


Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FARMERS' BULLETIN

Has been rev.

--see rev.ed.


binders at

end of file.

568

Contribution from the Bureau of Plant Industry, Wm. A. Taylor, Chief.

February 6, 1914.



SUGAR-BEET GROWING UNDER HUMID CONDITIONS.

By C. O. TOWNSEND,

Pathologist, Cotton and Truck Disease and Sugar-Plant Investigations.

SOIL.

It is generally conceded that the best soils for the production of sugar beets are the sandy loams and the clay loams. However, any good soil if properly handled will produce satisfactory sugar beets provided the climatic conditions are favorable. In general, more depends upon the physical condition of the soil and the way in which it is worked than upon its strict classification. The physical condition of the soil depends upon a number of factors which are of prime importance in the selection and preparation of the ground for sugar-beet growing. For example, the soil should be well drained and at the same time it should be capable of holding a sufficient amount of moisture for the needs of the beets. Even the so-called muck soils will produce good beets if they are well drained and properly worked. On the other hand, the loamy soils will sometimes produce very poor crops if not well drained or if otherwise improperly handled.

For the retention of sufficient moisture for crop production the supply of humus plays an important part. A soil that is well drained and at the same time properly supplied with humus will not only hold enough moisture for the needs of the plants, but it will permit the air to circulate through it and enable the soil organisms to thrive and multiply, thereby liberating an abundance of plant food.

The nature of the subsoil has an important bearing upon the selection of soil for sugar-beet growing. Hardpan subsoils should be avoided, especially if they are so near the surface that they will interfere with the proper growth and development of the roots. Likewise, the very porous or gravelly subsoils which permit of rapid leaching will not give the best results with sugar beets or other crops, because the moisture passes down too rapidly and not enough is retained in

the soil proper to supply the needs of the plants. At the same time, if there is an abundance of rain on such soils, so that the plants are seemingly well supplied with moisture, the soluble plant food, the only kind which is of any use to the plant, will be washed out and to some extent lost. The disadvantages of a porous subsoil may be overcome in a measure by furnishing the surface soil with a good supply of humus and giving it such tilth that as much of the moisture as possible will be retained in the surface soil. In selecting soils for sugar beets, therefore, careful attention should be given both to the soil proper and to the subsoil. In general, if a soil has been producing good crops of corn, potatoes, etc., it will produce good beets provided it receives the proper preparation and cultivation. In selecting a field for sugar beets it is advisable, therefore, to note the kind of soil and its condition, especially with reference to drainage and humus, the kind and quality of the preceding crops, and the nature and location of the subsoil.

The field selected should be reasonably free from weeds, since extreme foulness of ground adds very materially to the cost of growing beets. The beet field must be kept free from weeds if one expects to obtain anything like satisfactory results. It is sometimes claimed that a beet crop is of great advantage in freeing a field from weeds. This is true if the ground is properly handled, but one should see to it that not too large a percentage of the profits of the crop is consumed in fighting the weeds, a condition which may be avoided by careful attention to the preceding crops with respect to weed growth. This emphasizes again the importance of personal knowledge of the individual field. This knowledge the farm owner acquires either consciously or unconsciously if he works his farm intelligently and is a fairly close observer, but the tenant who is constantly shifting from one farm to another is handicapped in that he lacks this personal knowledge of the individual fields, which he should have in order to locate his crops to the best advantage.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS.

The principal climatic conditions which have an important bearing upon sugar-beet culture are temperature, precipitation, and winds. Other things being equal, an average temperature of about 70° F. during the growing season will usually give the best results so far as the sugar content of the beets is concerned. If the average temperature is very much above this point, sugar does not seem to form readily, and consequently the beets are of poor quality. On the other hand, if the temperature is too low the beets do not grow well and the tonnage is correspondingly low. Aside from the temperature of the growing season, the spring and fall temperatures have much to do with the success or failure of beet culture. Late

spring freezes following a favorable period for planting and germination will frequently destroy the young plants and involve considerable extra expense and labor in replanting. A protracted cold spell after the seed is planted will retard germination and growth and often give the beets a setback, from which they frequently fail to recover fully. A well-drained soil, rich in humus, will tend to offset these adverse conditions to some extent.

Cool nights and moderately warm days in the latter part of summer and in the fall are most favorable for the storage of sugar in the beets. The great danger from extreme cold in the fall is that the beets may be frozen in the ground. This sometimes occurs and causes considerable loss to the grower. Every grower should aim to get his beets out and, if necessary, siloed before freezing weather sets in. If the roots themselves freeze, no great amount of damage will result, provided they remain frozen until they are worked through the mill, but if they alternately freeze and thaw, they will soon blacken, decay, and become worthless for sugar-making purposes. Frozen beets should not be put into the sheds with the expectation of leaving them for any length of time, as they will certainly spoil. The only safe way is to get the beets out of the ground before they freeze and put sufficient covering over them so that they will not be frosted.

The amount of precipitation in the form of rain or snow which falls in a given area is beyond our control, but considerable can be done toward getting the full benefit of the precipitation, whether it comes in summer or in winter. If the ground is plowed deep in the fall and left rough, the snow will not blow off, and as it melts it will sink into the ground, where much of it may be held for future use. A good supply of vegetable matter in the soil together with proper tillage will aid materially in holding the moisture, while proper drainage will carry off any excess of water which might be injurious to the plants.

In most of the humid regions where sugar beets are grown winds do little, if any, damage to the sugar-beet crop. But in some areas lying close to the irrigated sections wind control is an important problem, and, indeed, is sometimes the limiting factor in sugar-beet growing. In some of these areas the rainfall would be sufficient to produce a good crop of beets were it not for the hot winds in spring and summer, which frequently increase the evaporation to an abnormal extent. Windbreaks, an abundant supply of humus, and good dirt mulches on the surface of the fields will largely offset the bad effects of these winds. In addition to the influence that these winds have upon evaporation they frequently do considerable damage in blowing the seed out of the ground before it germinates and in cutting off the

young plants soon after they come up. To prevent this as far as possible, the surface of the fields in these areas should not be too smooth, but should be kept slightly ridged and somewhat lumpy.

PLOWING.

There are two important points in plowing for sugar beets that should be kept in mind, namely, the time and the depth. Experience has demonstrated that the best results are generally obtained by plowing the ground for beets in the fall. Taking advantage of this fact, the beet grower will try to arrange his work and his crop rotation so that he can plow his beet ground in the fall, provided the soil and weather conditions will permit.

The advantages in fall plowing are numerous and distinct. In the first place, if the ground is plowed in the fall under proper conditions it will be in better physical condition in the spring because of the fact that the weather has had free access to the soil particles and put them in better shape to part with the elements necessary for plant growth. Fall-plowed land also tends to take up more readily the winter rains and snows that fall upon it. This precipitation not only helps to put the ground in better condition for a crop, but it may be made to supply a large amount of moisture to tide over dry periods that are almost sure to come every spring or summer. If the ground is plowed in the fall that much work is out of the way and the rush of work that is always present in the spring is greatly relieved. Fall plowing also enables the farmer to work down his ground earlier, thereby holding more moisture and putting his soil earlier in condition for his crops.

There are, of course, conditions under which fall plowing is impracticable, either because of lack of time or because the condition of the ground makes it impossible. Every farmer of experience knows the injurious effects of plowing ground when it is not in the right condition to be worked. If for any reason spring plowing becomes necessary it is even more important that the ground be in proper condition as regards moisture when plowed in order to make satisfactory seed and root beds.

The depth of plowing is fully as important as the time. It has been demonstrated again and again that deep plowing will give the best results for sugar beets, other things being equal. If the ground is plowed in the fall it is hardly possible to plow too deep, provided the ground is in condition to be plowed at all. If the plowing must be delayed until spring it is not advisable to plow more than 1 or 2 inches deeper than the ground was previously plowed, since too much raw soil on the surface does not make a good seed bed. It is assumed that the plowing is done with a moldboard plow, which is the implement commonly used in humid regions. If, however, the plowing

is done with a disk plow the ground can be stirred to a greater depth even in the spring without injury to the seed bed. This is due to the fact that the disk plow has a tendency to mix the top and bottom soils without bringing so much raw soil to the surface as is done with the moldboard plow.

The practice of subsoil plowing for beets is not so common as formerly. The experiments as well as field tests conducted by the writer indicate that the extra expense of subsoiling is not generally justified. There are instances, however, in which this operation should not be omitted. For example, if the plowing for any reason can not be over 7 or 8 inches deep and the subsoil is so hard that the beet roots can penetrate it only with difficulty, the action of the subsoil plow will be beneficial and should not be neglected.

The whole object of plowing should be to make a deep, rich seed and root bed which can be penetrated easily by the beet roots and from which the plants can draw an abundant supply of food necessary for their constant and rapid growth. At the same time, the seed bed must be firm enough to hold the plants securely in place and not so compact that the air can not circulate freely through it. The depth of plowing should be as nearly uniform as possible throughout the field, and the plow should be set so that the entire surface area of the field is turned.

FITTING SEED AND ROOT BEDS.

Plowing is only one step in the preparation of the seed bed for beets, and unless the subsequent fitting of the ground is done with intelligence and care it matters little whether the plowing is deep or shallow. In fact, unless the grower is prepared to work down the soil into a firm seed bed it is better in most cases to plow shallow. It is assumed, however, that the grower wants the best possible seed bed for his beets. If so, he will plow the ground to a good depth in the fall and begin at once the preparation of the seed bed.

If the seed bed is carefully selected and thoroughly prepared, the success of the crop is more than half assured. As already indicated, the seed bed is not only the storehouse which is to supply the plants with food material and moisture, but it must be a medium for holding the plants firmly in place during the growing season. The root must be constantly in contact with the fine moist particles of soil; otherwise, it can not dissolve and take up the mineral elements necessary for the growth of the plant. The root needs also a certain amount of air, and the soil should therefore be in such physical condition that the air can circulate freely through it. At the same time no air spaces of any appreciable size should be allowed to remain in or below the seed bed. Air spaces are detrimental in that they allow the seed

bed to dry out too rapidly and do not permit a sufficiently firm and uniform medium for the proper growth of the plants.

The primary aim, therefore, in fitting the seed bed for beets should be to make it deep, fine, and firm. If the ground was thoroughly worked for the preceding crops and is in proper condition when plowed, the subsequent fitting of the seed bed will be much easier. If the ground is plowed in the fall, the winter rains and snows will tend to make it sufficiently compact. If the plowing is done in the spring, or if the nature of the soil is such that it will not be sufficiently firmed by the natural elements, the plowing should be followed by a subsurface packer. It is not sufficient to pack the surface of the ground only, which is so frequently done, but the lower part of the seed bed, which is, strictly speaking, the root bed, must be thoroughly firmed. In the spring, as soon as the ground can be worked, it should be harrowed or disked. If the field is free from weeds a good harrowing to hold the moisture will be sufficient, but if weeds are starting, it will be best to double-disk and then harrow. The roller is a useful tool in firming the surface of the seed bed, and the alternate rolling and harrowing of the field will usually put it in good condition for planting, provided the lower part of the seed bed has been well firmed by either natural or artificial means.

Care should always be taken never to work the ground when it is too wet, as that invariably injures the texture of the soil, prevents the free circulation of the air, and renders the formation of a first-class seed bed impossible. The object sought, namely, the making of a deep, firm, well-drained, well-aerated, moisture-holding seed bed, should be kept in mind, and the methods employed and the tools used in securing the desired results must be governed to some extent by the condition of the individual field.

DRAINAGE.

Drainage is one of the important factors in beet growing in humid regions, as it is an important factor in the production of all kinds of crops under all conditions. Drainage is of two kinds, natural and artificial. Natural drainage may be due to the porosity of the soil, which allows the water to pass through it readily, or it may be due to the slope of the surface soil or the slope of the subsoil. Naturally drained soils may or may not be good crop producers. If the water passes through or off from the soil too rapidly the fertility is liable to be leached or washed out to such an extent that the soil is deficient in humus and lacking in the required amount of moisture for crop production.

Soils may be drained artificially by means of the open ditch or the blind ditch. In most beet-growing sections the land is too valuable

to admit of the use of the open ditch to any considerable extent, except under some conditions as outlets for the blind ditches. For this reason the blind ditch in which tiles are commonly used is the most general method employed in artificially draining beet land. No invariable rule can be given for the depth at which tiles should be laid, but in general they should be deep enough so that they will not be disturbed by deep plowing, and at the same time near enough to the surface so that the water will readily find its way into them. The depth must therefore be governed by the nature of the soil. The hard subsoil which holds the water and causes undrained soil to become water-logged should be deep enough to allow the tile to be laid at

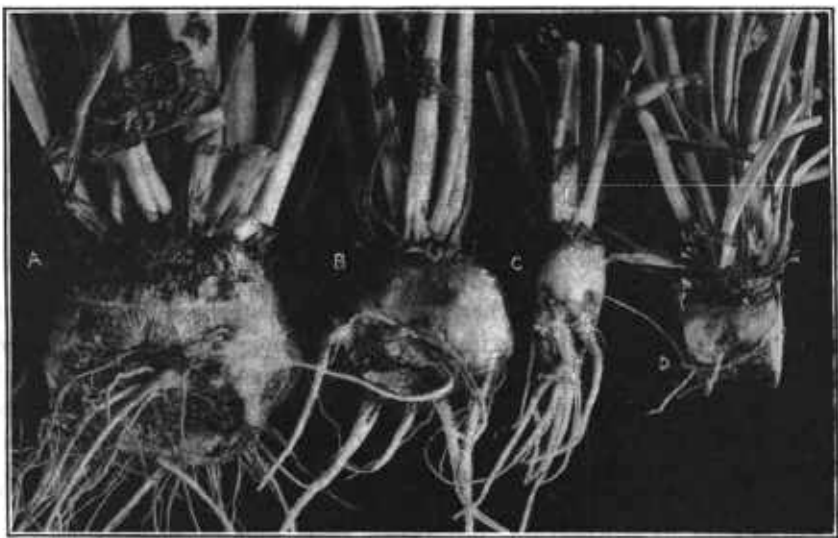


FIG. 1.—Sugar beets, showing the effect of water standing in the field, due to poor drainage.

or near the surface of this water-holding stratum without being disturbed by the plow; otherwise, the conditions are not good for beet growing. The tiles should form a continuous, but very gentle, slope and should be large enough to carry the water off readily. The rows of tile should be sufficiently close to drain the entire water-logged area.

While sugar beets are hardy and thrive under many adverse conditions, there is no crop that responds more readily to good drainage, and therefore the initial cost of artificial drainage for sugar beets is a paying proposition which leaves the land in better physical condition for other crops.

Figure 1 shows the effect of water-logged land on beets. Such roots as those shown in this illustration are not adapted to milling, and in large quantity they would be liable to rejection by the factory.

HOLDING THE MOISTURE.

The ability of the soil to hold the required amount of moisture for plant growth is of equal importance to good drainage. In order to get a clear notion of this fact it should be remembered that soil moisture exists as free moisture or water that will readily flow off or through the ground under proper conditions, and also as moisture which adheres to the soil particles and keeps them damp. A soil which allows practically all the moisture to pass through it or to evaporate and leaves it comparatively dry in a short time is in poor condition for crop production. This unfavorable condition may be overcome to a considerable extent by properly handling the soil.

If the suggestions given in regard to preparing the seed and root bed are followed and the soil is left firm and compact, it will hold moisture to a far greater extent than if left loose and porous. The crusting or baking of the soil should, of course, be avoided, as this condition favors rapid evaporation. Again, a good supply of humus in the soil aids very materially in retaining the desired amount of moisture.

PLANTING.

WIDTH OF ROW.

For a number of years there has been considerable difference of opinion among beet growers in regard to the most profitable distance between the rows. In our experiments, conducted for a number of years at different places in which the distances 20, 24, and 28 inches were used, we invariably found that the most profitable distance was 20 inches, everything considered. It is true that the narrower rows require more work because of the larger number of rows per acre and greater care in cultivation, but in all cases the extra expense was more than offset by the heavier yield, even though the individual roots were sometimes smaller. In a few experiments 18 and 22 inches were tried, but the results did not differ materially from the 20-inch rows. Considering the yield as compared with the cost of growing the beets with different widths of row, 20 inches is most generally satisfactory. One argument in favor of the wider row is that the grower in using the wide row is able to utilize a corn cultivator and thereby avoid the expense of an extra tool for cultivating his beets. However, good strong land that is capable of growing a satisfactory row of beets every 20 inches will soon pay for a beet cultivator in the extra yield, and if one expects to remain in the beet-growing business, as most growers do after trying it for two or three years, it will certainly pay to have a beet cultivator, even if the acreage each year is small.

DEPTH OF PLANTING.

The depth at which beet seed should be planted is an important consideration for a good stand of beets. The quicker the leaves get through to the light and the roots strike down into the firm root bed the better the stand and the stronger the plants will be. Therefore shallow planting, one-half to three-fourths of an inch, is advisable provided there is moisture enough to produce germination. The seed should be placed in the moist soil at such a depth that the moisture can be kept in contact with the seed until the roots have begun to develop.

Every grower of experience realizes that soils differ considerably in their ability to hold the moisture near the surface. Climatic conditions have a marked influence on soils in this regard. In general, the depth of planting will vary from one-half inch to 1½ inches. Good stands are sometimes obtained with still deeper planting. In such cases, however, a slight crusting of the ground or a reduction of the temperature of the soil may retard the germination and growth of the seedlings, causing them either to fail to get through to the light or to get through in a weakened condition. It is therefore much safer to plant shallow and then use every effort to keep the moisture near enough to the surface to produce a quick and even germination.

The press wheels on the drill are important agencies in holding or bringing the moisture up to the seed, and should be set so that they will exert a firm and uniform pressure on the drill row. In case this pressure is not sufficient to produce the desired result, we have found the smooth roller a very satisfactory tool to supplement the work of the press wheels. It is assumed, of course, that the ground is in just the right condition when the planting is done; that is, that the soil is not damp enough to stick to the press wheels and thereby be cemented together after the press wheels have passed over it. The same precaution is necessary when the roller is used, so that the ground in both cases will be left firm but mellow.

It is important also that the depth of planting be uniform. This applies to one drill shoe as compared with another and also to the same drill shoe in different parts of the same field. The depth at which one drill shoe plants as compared with another is a simple matter of adjustment, which can best be made on a level, smooth floor before the drill is taken to the field. The problem of making the same shoe plant at the same depth throughout the entire length of the row each time across the field is a question of the uniformity in the surface of the field and uniformity in the firmness of all parts of the field. If there are soft areas, so that the wheels sink in to a greater depth in some places than in others, the seed will be deposited at correspondingly varying depths. Likewise, if there are small

depressions or elevations over which the wheels or drill shoes pass, the seed will be planted deeper or more shallow, as the case may be.

The result of uneven depth of planting is a lack of uniformity in the beets when they come up, a condition which is troublesome in thinning. Either the larger beets must be thinned when the smaller ones are too small, or the larger ones must be allowed to get too large.

SPACING AND THINNING.

At the present time practically all beet seed is planted in solid rows instead of in hills. For this reason the beets must be spaced and thinned, since they must stand one in a place at suitable distances apart in order to produce satisfactory yields. The spacing is almost universally done by means of a hand hoe of convenient size, which is operated at right angles to the row, leaving the remaining beets in small tufts at suitable distances from each other in the row. The beets that are removed by the hoe must be cut off at such a depth that they will not grow again. Numerous attempts have been made to devise a power implement that will space several rows at one time. The mechanical construction of such an implement is comparatively simple, but the fact that the beets in the row are seldom uniform in size or in stand makes the use of such a tool unsatisfactory.

It is always desirable to leave the larger and stronger plants to make the crop, and these are seldom to be found at regular and desired intervals in the row. Hence, judgment must be used in spacing the beets. Sometimes the spacing must be a little wider and sometimes a little narrower to meet these requirements, and there is no implement equal to the hoe in the hands of an interested, intelligent, and observing grower. After the spacing has been done the remaining beets should stand in tufts or bunches at intervals of from 8 to 12 inches in the row. If the soil is strong and has a good water-holding capacity, it is safe to leave the tufts a little closer than if the soil is not so strong and has less ability to hold moisture. Spacing the beets is therefore a matter of sound judgment based upon experience and a knowledge of the soil conditions.

Owing to the nature of the seed balls, composed of from one to seven seeds, the seedlings stand very close together in the tufts. This necessitates thinning by hand, which is the most tedious operation in beet growing (fig. 2). The thinning must be carefully done, so that the beets will stand one in a place at intervals governed by the distance between the tufts when the beets were spaced. It is a well-known fact that two beets growing in contact with one another will not give as great a weight of root as a single beet would have produced at that point. This emphasizes the importance of thinning

to a single beet in each place and leaving no doubles. The success of the crop depends also to a great extent upon the time at which the thinning is done, as well as upon the care that is exercised in doing it.

In general, the thinning should be done just as soon as possible after the beets get large enough to be handled, which is usually when they have four leaves. The reason for early thinning becomes apparent when we remember that there is in the soil at a given time a given amount of available plant food and moisture, and the earlier the useless plants are removed the more food and moisture will be



FIG. 2.—Thinning sugar beets. This work, owing to the closeness of the young plants, must be done by hand.

left for the beets that are to make the crop. The same principle holds true in regard to weeds, which should all be carefully removed from the row when thinning. As in spacing, the tufts containing the largest and strongest beets should be left, so in thinning, the largest and strongest beet in each tuft should be left to make the crop. Unless this point is carefully watched the largest beets will invariably be pulled out, as they are always the easiest to get hold of. These are minor points, but if carefully considered they will make a remarkable difference in the final yield.

After the beets are thinned they wilt for a time, leaving the bent-over stems exposed to the hot rays of the sun. For this reason the dirt should be drawn up around the plants when thinning, in order to protect them as far as possible.

HOEING.

The beets should receive a good hoeing at the time they are thinned; that is, the dirt should be loosened up on all sides of the beet and all weeds carefully removed. The number of subsequent hoeings will depend upon local conditions. As a matter of fact the subsequent hoeings are not hoeings at all, as the work is usually performed, but consist simply in cutting out the weeds. This work is good as far as it goes, and the so-called hoeings should be repeated often enough to keep the field free from weeds. In going over the field for the first hoeing after the beets have been thinned, a close watch should be kept for doubles, and wherever more than one beet in a place is found all but the largest should be pulled out.

CULTIVATING.

Sugar beets should be given their first cultivation just as soon as the rows can be followed. This can be done before the spacing and thinning and again as soon as the beets straighten up after thinning. No fixed rule can be laid down for the number of cultivations that a field should receive, since this must be governed by weather conditions. In general, there should be a cultivation after each rain, and in case of drought the cultivations should be frequent, in order to retain the moisture below.

It should be kept in mind that cultivation serves three important purposes, namely, opening the soil to admit air, enabling it to absorb and retain moisture, and to destroy weeds. Few people seem to realize that air is necessary to root growth and development; but experience has shown that air is just as essential to the activities of root growth and development as moisture. If the ground is broken up, not only will the air circulate through it, but it will absorb rain more readily, and the dirt mulch formed by cultivation will tend to hold the moisture below. The mulch is more effective if it is granular or slightly lumpy rather than of dust formation.

Weeds rob the soil of both moisture and fertility and therefore should not be allowed to exist either in or between the beet rows. The attachments or combinations of attachments to be used on the cultivator will depend upon the desired object in cultivating; that is, whether it is to break up a crust, to form a mulch, to destroy weeds, or to perform two or more of these operations at one cultivation.

The 2-row walking cultivator (fig. 3) which has come into general use in some localities during the past few years has some decided advantages over the 4-row riding cultivator. Among other things it is more easily controlled, and consequently the damage from cultivating out the beets is greatly reduced. Few growers realize what a large percentage of their beets they sometimes lose by cultivating

them out. It may be only a few each time over the field, but these often amount to considerable in the course of the season. . The loss from this source is more likely to occur if the rows are crooked or the horses used have not a steady gait.

There is a wide difference of opinion in regard to the depth of cultivating, the distance that the cultivator teeth should run from the beets, and the kind of tools that should be used on the cultivator. These are all details that depend upon the condition of the soil, the size of the beets, and the object to be accomplished by cultivating. If the ground is quite foul, weeders should undoubtedly be used,

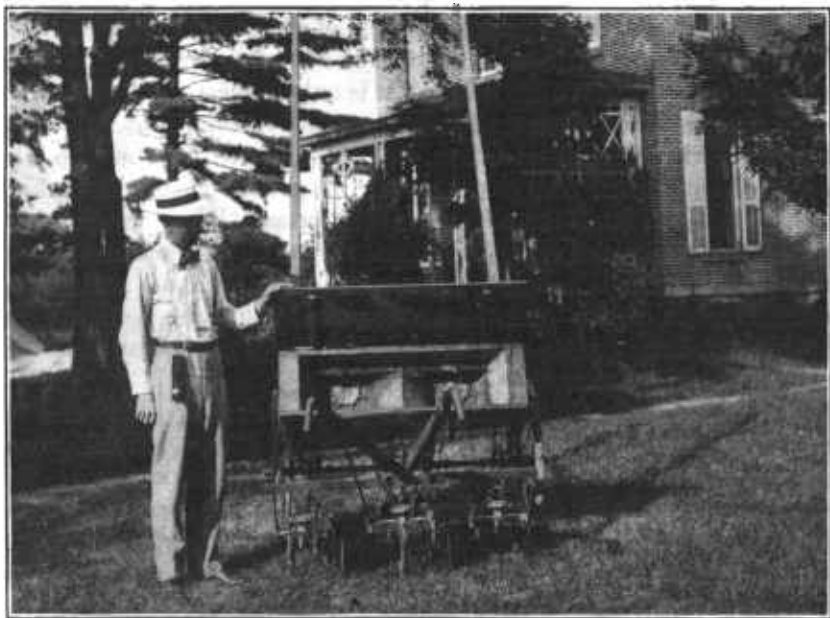


FIG. 3.—One-horse 2-row walking cultivator, with attachment for distributing fertilizer.

but they should be followed by deer-tongues set so that they will cut a little deeper than the weeders, in order to make a good mulch and to prevent the formation of a crust just below the mulch. If the ground has a tendency to become hard, the disks followed by deer-tongues properly adjusted will do good work while the beets are quite small. The disks should be set so that the dirt is thrown slightly away from the beets, and the deer-tongues should be set so that they will make a mulch over the entire surface of the ground between the beet rows and at the same time fill the small trench made by the disks. After the beets get larger, the deer-tongues alone are sufficient, or similar tools that will maintain a good mulch and keep the soil open so that a complete circulation of the air in the soil can be kept up.

In no case should the cultivator teeth be allowed to run deep enough to cut off the feeding roots, and care should be taken to avoid throwing dirt into the crowns of the beets.

As a rule the beet crop is laid by too early. It has been found by repeated experiments on a commercial scale that by continuing cultivation just as long as it is possible to get through the beets, even if some of the outer leaves are broken, the tonnage will be perceptibly and profitably increased without any decrease in the sugar content.

ROTATION.

Every good farmer realizes that the best results are obtained with all crops when a carefully planned system of crop rotation is practiced. We hear now and then of a successful one-crop farmer, but he is always the exception to the rule and it is only a question of time when some pest or some climatic condition will overtake him and show him the folly of such a course. Closely related to the one-crop farmer is the farmer who grows several crops but persists in making each crop follow itself for a long series of years. These methods are attended with a great deal of risk, not necessarily on account of the poor physical condition which often arises from their use and not so much because of the plant foods removed from the soil as from the propagation of pests of many kinds. These pests may be either insects, fungi, or bacteria.

It is well known that each particular pest develops best and increases most rapidly on some particular crop. It sometimes happens that one or more of these pests may thrive upon several crops. For example, the fungous disease known as scab attacks both the white potato and the sugar beet. Hence, potatoes following beets or beets following potatoes may be affected by this disease even though it is the first year that this particular crop is grown in that soil.

It is important, therefore, that care should be exercised in planning a rotation system, in order that the possible evils may be avoided as far as practicable and the best results obtained. No hard-and-fast system of rotation can be advocated for any locality, but a carefully planned system should be worked out for each farm to meet its individual needs. There are some principles, however, of general application, and these should be borne in mind in planning a rotation system in which sugar beets are included.

If practicable, the crop preceding the beets should be of such a nature that it can be harvested in time to plow the ground in the fall for the coming beet crop. The crops preceding and following the beet crop should be of such a kind that they will not serve as food or host plants for the same pests that attack beets. For example, beans preceding beets and small grains following them will meet these requirements fairly well and thereby form part of a good

rotation system, provided it fits in with the other farming operations and conditions. There should be one leguminous crop, such as peas, beans, clover, etc., and if the soil is deficient in humus a crop of some kind should be grown to plow under for green manure. This is especially important where the farm does not furnish sufficient stable manure to supply the soil with the requisite amount of humus. There is some danger in following a sod of any kind with beets, on account of the possible presence of wireworms, cutworms, and grubs, which often live over the winter in the sod and are ready to attack the beets the following year. It is safer, therefore, to follow sod with two other crops before planting it to beets.

LIVE STOCK.

One of the most profitable adjuncts of good beet farming is live stock, especially cows. They will utilize the beet tops to the best possible advantage. It is well known that the leaves and crowns of the beets, the parts removed when the beets are topped, contain a large percentage of the mineral matter taken up in the process of growth. If the tops are properly fed to cows, the flow of milk will be increased, the cows put in good physical condition, and the mineral matter and a portion of the vegetable matter may be and should be returned to the soil in the form of stable manure.

Beet tops are good for sheep also, but they should be fed sparingly at first and gradually increased as the animals become used to the new feed. In feeding tops to sheep the general custom is to pasture the tops after the beets have been hauled to the factory. This practice eliminates the work of gathering and hauling the tops, and leaves the droppings on the field to enrich the soil. This method of feeding the tops has one serious disadvantage in that the ground is often in the right condition at that season of the year to be unduly packed by the trampling of the stock. The method of feeding the tops is a detail which may be worked out to best advantage for each farm, depending upon local conditions, and should not deter any farmer from keeping all the live stock that the size of his farm, his system of crop rotation, and the available help will permit.

FERTILIZERS.

The importance and the possibility of not only maintaining but improving the fertility of our soils is recognized at the present time by all intelligent farmers. There are three classes of fertilizers that are useful in accomplishing good results, i. e., stable manure, green crops plowed under, and the so-called commercial or mineral fertilizers. In the long run, no kind of soil improver can be used to the exclusion of the others if we hope to increase the fertility of our soils to the fullest extent and to reap the greatest profit from our labor. As

already stated, stable manure is indispensable, but there are few farms on which enough manure is produced to maintain the soil in the best physical condition and to replace the fertilizing elements removed by the crops. For this reason in part, every rotation system should include one crop to be plowed under. Whether the primary object of the crops should be to increase the vegetable matter in the soil or in addition to this to increase the nitrogen content of the soil will depend upon conditions, and selection of the crop should be made accordingly.

If vegetable matter alone is required, such plants as rape, rye, etc., should be used, but if nitrogen also is needed, then plants like peas, beans, clover, etc., should be grown and plowed under. Vegetable matter in the soil is so essential and is so liable to be deficient that the importance of constantly renewing it can not be too strongly emphasized. Briefly, the presence of vegetable matter improves the physical condition of the soil, helps it to retain moisture, and enables the soil organisms to increase rapidly and to do their work in soil improvement. A soil deficient in vegetable matter is said to be dead, which is literally true, and our aim should be to keep it alive and well supplied with air, moisture, and available plant food. We can not increase the actual amount of phosphoric acid and potash in the soil by the use of green manures or by crop rotations, but we can by these means do much to render these elements available for the growing plants.

When we have done all that we can do to increase the available plant food by the use of green crops and stable manure and find that our soils are still too low in one or more of the elements necessary for the best plant growth, we should avail ourselves of the use of commercial fertilizers. These should always be used intelligently; otherwise, loss instead of gain is likely to result. For example, if we plan to use a form of fertilizer that is not readily soluble we should apply it long enough in advance of the crop to give it time to become soluble, remembering that no mineral matter in the soil can be taken up and made use of by the plant until it is dissolved.

HARVESTING.

Harvesting sugar beets consists of three distinct operations, i. e., lifting, pulling, and topping. The lifting is done either with a double-pointed implement somewhat resembling a two-pointed plow, or by means of a side lifter, which is a small shoe or plow on the end of a long shank. The former is so operated that one point of the implement passes along the row on either side of the beets, raising them several inches out of the ground. The latter passes along one side of the beet row and loosens the beets without appreciably lifting them out of the ground. These implements are usually operated

by means of horse power, but engines with proper attachments may be used. The kind of lifter to be used is largely a matter of personal choice. As a rule, the side lifter has a lighter draft, but in either case the only precaution necessary is that all the beets be loosened and that as few of them as possible be broken.

After the beets are loosened they are thrown into piles (fig. 4). The number of rows of beets used in making a pile row is a matter of convenience, and it should be remembered that the larger the piles the more quickly the beets can be loaded. When the beets are pulled, more or less dirt will cling to them, but as much as possible of this should be removed by shaking them or by gently striking two or



FIG. 4.—Piling and topping sugar beets.

more of them together when pulled. Before topping the beets, the ground where the topped beets are to be piled should be smoothed down and freed from clods, tops, etc., so that the beets can be forked on to the wagon free from all refuse.

In topping the beets they should be cut off squarely at the lowest leaf scar. This is usually done with one stroke of a heavy knife. When the beets are delivered at the factory or loading station samples are taken and if the beets have not been properly topped the sample is retopped. The percentage of weight removed by this extra topping is called the "crown" tare, and from the sample is determined the tare for the entire load. The tare consists of two parts, i. e., the crown tare and the dirt tare. The latter is the percentage of dirt that clings to the sample as compared with the weight of the roots. In actual practice in determining the tare the sample is first weighed just as it comes from the load; it is then properly topped, the dirt is removed by means of a stiff brush, and the clean sample is again weighed. The difference determines the percentage of tare.

The beets should be covered as soon as possible after they are topped, in order to prevent evaporation. The roots work much better in the mill if they are kept fresh and crisp, and they lose considerable weight if exposed to the sun and wind. If the beets are to remain in the field only a short time after topping it is usually sufficient to cover them with the tops, but if they are to remain for some days, and especially if there is danger of freezing, the piles of roots should be covered with a sufficient layer of earth to protect them.

BY-PRODUCTS.

BEET TOPS.

The by-products of the beet field and sugar mill that are of special importance to the farmer are the beet tops, the pulp, and the waste lime. The value of beet tops as a stock food has been briefly mentioned under the subject of live stock. If properly handled they form a valuable asset for the beet grower, and in considering the value of a beet crop they should be reckoned at their real worth as a stock food. Many farmers sell the tops for a cash price ranging from \$2.50 to \$5 per acre. In this case the beet grower is the loser, for two reasons: In the first place, the tops are of greater value to him as a stock food and, in the second place, if he allows the tops to leave his farm he loses their manurial value, consisting of a large part of the mineral plant food taken up by beets in the process of growth, and also their humus value, which results from returning the tops to the soil in the form of stable or barnyard manure.

The most economical way to handle the tops is to gather them into piles soon after they wilt and before they become thoroughly dried. In this condition they can be gathered with much less loss than would be the case if they were left scattered over the ground until dried. After they have cured in the piles they should be hauled to the feed yard, where they should be fed in properly constructed racks to avoid waste. The resulting manure should be hauled to the field and evenly spread, preferably with a manure spreader, and plowed under. If the tops were free from disease the manure can be profitably applied to the ground to be used for the next crop of beets. However, if any disease, especially leaf-spot or crown-rot, was noticeable on the beet leaves and crowns, the manure should be used only on the ground that is not to be put into beets for two years or more; or, better, the wilted tops should be put into the silo, where all leaf-spot spores will be killed.

PULP.

Beet pulp is likewise an excellent stock food. This by-product is the refuse that remains after the beet roots have been sliced and the sugar extracted. As a stock food it may be used either as green pulp, that is, just as it comes from the mill, or it may be dried. The pulp

is prepared for the drier by having the excess water pressed out, after which it is subjected either to direct heat or steam heat until it is apparently dry. It may be dried by itself or it may have molasses or other material mixed with it to improve its feeding value. The composition of the dried pulp as guaranteed by one of the large dealers is as follows: Protein, not under 8 per cent; fat, not under one-half of 1 per cent; sugar and starch, not under 4 per cent; fiber, not over 20 per cent; extract (carbohydrates), not under 58 per cent; total carbohydrates, including fiber, not under 76 per cent; ashes, $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

While the pulp, either green or dried, is an excellent stock food, it is not a balanced ration and should therefore be fed with other protein material. The dried pulp is sacked and may be shipped long distances, while the wet pulp is usually fed near the mill, although it is sometimes transported a considerable distance by rail. In any case, farmers, and especially dairymen, will find this by-product an excellent addition to other stock food. The dried pulp will keep almost indefinitely if stored in a dry place, and the wet pulp will keep for several months even when piled on the ground in the open.

WASTE LIME.

Waste lime is a by-product of the sugar mill, which under certain conditions is of considerable value to the farmer in correcting the acid condition of the soil. It is well known that a soil should be neutral or slightly alkaline in order to produce the best results. Lime has the ability to combine with the injurious acids that develop in the soil and thereby render them neutral. If, therefore, a soil is inclined to be acid, an application of lime will be beneficial. If just enough lime is added to combine with the acid in the soil the result will be a neutral soil; that is, one which is neither acid nor alkaline. If an excess of lime is added the soil will be rendered alkaline.

Since a slightly alkaline soil is not injurious to sugar beets or other field crops, it is advisable in case a soil has become acid to give it a good application of lime. Ordinarily, an application of from 500 to 2,000 pounds of waste lime per acre will correct the acidity and otherwise improve the soil. In this connection it should be stated that poorly drained soils are the ones most inclined to become sour, a fact which still further emphasizes the importance of good drainage. It is not necessary that waste lime from the sugar mill be used to correct soil acidity. Any finely divided or air-slaked lime will serve the purpose. However, the waste lime may usually be had for the hauling and for that reason is an inexpensive remedy for sour soils.

The physical condition of certain soils may be improved by the use of lime. This is especially true of heavy soils, which tend to become too compact. An application of lime to such soils will often

render them porous, thereby enabling the farmer to prepare more satisfactory seed and root beds for his crops. Furthermore, such soils will more readily absorb and retain moisture and allow the air to circulate more freely through them.

Lime is in itself an important plant food, and soils deficient in lime may easily be corrected by an application of the waste lime from a sugar mill. In addition to the lime itself, this by-product, known as waste lime, lime cake, or sludge, contains from 3 to 4 per cent of nitrogen, 4 to 5 per cent of phosphate, and 8 to 10 per cent of organic matter, all of which makes it a valuable fertilizer for soils deficient in one or more of these substances. The value of this by-product has never been fully realized, and it should come into more general use for the purposes mentioned above. It has an actual money value that is recognized in Europe not only by the farmers, who purchase large quantities of it for use on the land, but also by the manufacturers of commercial fertilizer, who use it to good advantage as a filler or makeweight in the manufacture of their goods.

SUMMARY.

Select the field for sugar beets with reference to the quality of the surface and subsoils; the condition of drainage, and their fitness to follow the preceding crop.

Plow thoroughly and deeply in the fall if possible.

Make the seed bed firm below as well as near the surface.

Plant in the spring as soon as the soil and weather conditions are right.

Use plenty of seed to insure a good stand, and do not plant too deep.

Hold the moisture in contact with the seed by the use of the press wheels and the roller.

Cultivate as soon as the rows can be seen, but do not throw the dirt over the beets.

Block and thin the beets just as soon as they are large enough to handle.

Space with reference to the strength and moisture-holding capacity of the soil.

In thinning, aim to leave the strongest and best beets.

Rotate with other crops to improve the soil condition and to eliminate pests.

Keep plenty of live stock to utilize the beet tops and other feed and to supply stable manure.

In harvesting the beets see that they are all gathered, properly topped, and as free as possible from dirt.

Cover the beets as soon as topped to prevent evaporation.

Utilize beet tops, pulp, and lime with a view to improving soil conditions.